

enthusiasm, while the English-speaking delegates look on, puzzled or bored.

The field of philosophical and metaphysical thinking in Africa is just being opened up and may prove to be the most interesting of all. One of the most important books in this difficult area of study is Janheinz Jahn's 'Muntu', and in particular the chapters entitled *Ntu* (Being) and *Nommo* (Logos). *Ntu*, it claims, is force, not substance. It manifests itself through four categories: *Muntu*, force possessing intelligence; *Kintu*, force not possessing intelligence; *Hantu*, space-time; and *Kuntu*, modality. The activating principles are *Buzima*, giving biological life, and *Magara*, giving spiritual life and endowing man with the power of the word, *Nommo*. The thesis teems, of course, with metaphysical problems, but it rests on wide acquaintance with the arts in Africa and on some close experience of African life. It is, as the German sub-title suggests, no more than a preliminary sketch in this field, in which so much more remains to be discovered.

## The Vanishing Diary of Anne Frank

MARTIN DWORKIN

Men of my unit went into two of those places the Nazis had efficiently called 'concentration camps', but for which there are other names: Buchenwald, near Weimar, and Ohrdruf, near Gotha. What struck the mind, and remained, was the unbelievable. The greater the horror, the more it was necessary to select details to make the whole have some reality. At Buchenwald, amid the fantastic complex of gas chambers and furnaces, the great sheds filled with human debris piled to the roofs, what seemed to affect the men most of all were some strange decorative plaques. A day or so afterwards, when an article in the service newspaper *Stars and Stripes* identified the objects as mounted pieces of tattooed human skin, the reaction was not quite melodramatic revulsion,

but a more sudden, self-conscious formation of what had actually been seen. The journalistic account put things into place; the sentences, with their plain words and terse phrases, made the entire experience into something that had happened. One man rushed over to say that the things described in the article were the things he had held in his hands. Now, he knew that his experience had been real, and he knew what it was he had experienced.

At Ohrdruf, some indignant civilians from the neighbourhood were being put to work digging graves and burying the bodies left untidily about when the camp was hastily abandoned by the guards. There were corpses with blackening gouges in the sides and back. One or two walking cadavers, their filthy rags flapping, explained that some of the starving inmates of the camp were able to eat the livers and other organs of those who died. Then, much as guides denoting sights of interest to passing tourists, they pointed out the ingenious arrangement whereby the furnaces of the crematoria heated the buildings of the commandant's headquarters. On the way out of the camp, one of the soldiers began saying that it all hadn't been real, that what we had just seen was a lot of propaganda. A few of the others in the jolting truck took this up, explaining why they did not choose to remember.

There are subjective limits to fact, as well as objective. The ways of knowing in which we are indoctrinated can alter or overlook occurrences, just as they give them the form in which they are knowable. It takes sensitivity, and sometimes—as any newspaper editor or professor of history can testify—a lot of training, to recognize the significance of the unfamiliar: the 'fantastic', the 'impossible', the 'inconceivable'. The very size of the horror the Nazis had perpetrated was difficult to make into a fact, into something that could be known. Millions of people, torn out of civilized living; collected and shipped like cattle; their bodies duly numbered and tattooed; marched in dehumanized gangs to insect labours: penned up and stripped and gassed and burned and powdered and scattered or packaged for fertilizer; their belongings sorted and stacked; the fillings of their teeth dug out of their dead jaws and melted into bullion. By now, we say we know these things. But how can we know them? One person who is bereaved of one beloved does not know how the world goes on. Millions of people. Many of us, of course, do not care. But for those who can care there is the problem of how to know. And it is here that an articulate vision, as in a work of art, can create the conditions of knowing, giving form to the inaccessible, bewilderingly complex and various realities that must be

grasped. It is in this sense, of the problem of bringing all who can care to the state of personal bereavement, that we must read and judge the diary of Anne Frank, and consider its dramatizations on stage and screen.

The existence of this book, that it was written and that it was preserved, is itself a fantastic event. There is no exact way of measuring its effect; we can only cite its translation in twenty-one languages, its distribution in ninety-five countries—figures comparable today only to those tabulating the successes of diligently popularized trivia. The statistics alone say nothing of the meaning of the book as an experience to the millions upon millions of separate readers. Only in some grandly indefinite way can we speak of how this journal of one single young girl may effect the individuals who read it; of how it has come to incarnate the anguish of the shadowy, uncountable myriads of separate persons who were unspeakably degraded, tortured, and obliterated. And this indeterminacy is carried into the dramatized versions, with their inevitable transformations of the images the book evokes in each private, unique reading.

The problem of the play and film goes deeper than that easily laboured old difficulty of whether it is possible to transcribe a book to stage or screen without ruining or cheapening its qualities. We may grant that each dramatization is a separate work, requiring judgment on its own merits first of all, with reference to its source secondary, although necessary. But each transcription, however excellent, must also be seen in that dreadful light of memory which is a kind of nimbus about the book. In that light, the original diary itself can appear incredible—too good to be what it is, too perfectly appropriate to have been left to a miraculous chain of chances: to be written in precisely this, exquisitely artless way; to remain intact in a pile of rubbish, while libraries and the records of centuries were lost; to be rediscovered in time to become a monument. A triumph of the book is that it has the grandeur to stand alone and undeniable as a work out of the enormity of what happened. In the light of actuality, and of its own unparalleled quality, all doubts and cavils about its authenticity are irrelevant.

But they return in considering the dramatizations—not any dramatizations, on principle, but these particular ones, on their merits. Not that the play and the film are not skillful, absorbing, eloquent in theme and execution in a drama and cinema pervaded by shrill irresponsibility and slick inconsequence. From its opening late in 1955, the play, by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, has won a reception perhaps

## THE VANISHING DIARY OF ANNE FRANK

unique in theatrical history. Audiences in more than thirty countries have approached it with a deference, and even reverence, rarely accorded any kind of play-acting, no matter how serious. The film, produced and directed by George Stevens from the screen play by Goodrich and Hackett, is likely to enjoy a wider response. In fact, it may be expected to heighten the intimacy of participation for many, according to the unique, quintessential nature of the movies as vicarious experience.

But it is in this intimacy, in this skillfully-engendered exercise of identification, that the film, following the play, perpetrates a fundamental falsity—that is not simply untrue to the spirit of the book, but projects back upon it unreasonable, ungrounded dubieties. Out of what must be seen as a carefully considered effort to universalize the imagination of a particular young girl, there emerges a picture of an imagination that is recognizable because it is all too familiar. The particular Jewish girl, born in Germany and raised in Holland, deeply, if still youthfully educated in the European literary tradition, with the meaning of her Jewishness vivid in every instant of her life, emerges as an apotheosized, yet theatrically conventional adolescent. The person of the play and film is knowable, but not in any way ambiguous, as is the author of the book. As a dramatized cliché, she may induce an illusion of recognition. But the very ease with which the audience is enabled to know her every mood and manner measures the mystery that is evaded—and enters a new doubt that so carefully commonplace a character could have created so richly individual a work, that has become the torch to light up the faces of all the unknown dead in the dark spaces of our hearts.

It is not simply a matter of performance, but of conception. The authors of the play and film were confronted by an enormous technical difficulty. The book consists entirely of the impressions of the girl who is the principal of the drama. All the characters are seen through her eyes. Their speech is as she recorded it or recreated it. The book is a diary: subjective, capricious, marked by unexpected divagations and tantalizing brevities, changes of attitude and explorations of new paths of reasoning as a child was growing into puberty. The play and film transpose the viewpoint. The audience no longer sees and hears and feels via the sensibilities of the girl, but observes her as the protagonist of an ordered drama.

In principle, of course, this may be wholly legitimate and even dramatically necessary—unless one were to argue the sovereign possibility

that the book itself be somehow retained and personified—perhaps as a continuing narration. By whatever device, such retention might preserve and project not only the distinctive imagery, but the asides, the mercurial malices and freshets of sentiment, the passionate dissections of motives and outcomes—determinedly juvenile and yet so consistently astute; and, perhaps most important, the constant, characteristic literary allusions, criticisms, and even quotations.

The book is not something that was written *about* the girl, her family and companions in hiding from the enveloping horror. The book *is* the girl; it is all we have of the girl. And the book, *Anne Frank*, is profoundly, passionately intellectual, emerging from the intellectual and spiritual vitalities of a Jewish family which talked and read and sang together in several languages, wrote poetry in honour of festive occasions, argued about judgments of history and works of art, fought throughout its vigil, in constant fear, discomfort, and privation, to preserve not only its existence and essential virtue, but actually as well as symbolically the entire humane tradition of knowledge and humility, intellect and spirit, laughter and charity.

The book is not the Anne Frank played on stage by Susan Strasberg, and on screen by her much less skilled imitator, Millie Perkins. The girl portrayed is a signally American figure of thoughtless youth. In 1955, one of the few critics who regarded the play unfavourably, Algene Ballif, wrote in *Commentary* that the Anne on stage was ‘. . . still another image of that fixed American idea of the adolescent, the central imperative of which is that this species of creature is not to be taken seriously. (Unless, of course, he becomes a delinquent.)’ In the Goodrich and Hackett versions of the book, the central poignance has been subtly diluted, in order to give it a familiar soft-drink flavour. The character of Anne is simplified to afford easy recognizability. The situation of the people in the secret hide-away is played out as a melodrama with an implied tragic ending, around a conventionally central love story. In place of the deepening maturity of the girl, as revealed by the diary’s always self-critical record of her changing observations, there is a progressive theatricalism carried over to the screen from the stage. If there is any gain in formal coherence and popular comprehension, there is a grievous loss in spiritual complexity—and in fundamental credibility.

The manner of the stress upon melodrama and romance is decisive here, and not any preconception of how a performable work might be constructed from the book. The possibility of alternative dramatizations, in fact, came up in a long and bitter litigation conducted against Kermit

Bloomgarden, producer of the play, Anne's father Otto Frank, and others, by Meyer Levin. Levin, author of *The Old Bunch*, *In Search*, and *Compulsion*, had prepared an adaptation of the diary in 1953, with a notable emphasis upon the Jewish character of the story, and an avowed purpose to retain as much of Anne Frank's own language as possible. Levin's charges of 'fraud and deceit' in the disposition of his prior claims to rights to dramatize the diary were not sustained in court. But a jury did award him the more-than-symbolic sum of \$50,000 for damages suffered in the inclusion of some of his original material in the version that was produced.

The merits of Levin's dramatization versus that of Goodrich and Hackett are not at issue here. But the evidence in the case of the deliberate shift of emphasis away from the Jewish spirit of the book, and from its particular literary character, is of great significance. Once again, the choice of tactics in popularizing a complex work has effected a qualitative change in the work itself. To persons who may never read the book, the Anne Frank of the play and film may be an adequately moving image: not so brilliantly unique that she could not be any girl in the audience; not so specifically Jewish that she could not be a member of any group that might be suffering some transient persecution. To these people, this Anne Frank may not represent the millions of Jews who were obliterated, as much as the popular image of youth's indictment of the adult world, that perpetually interferes with the romantic fulfilment of adolescent dreams.

It may be another example of the inexorable punctuality of accident, that the book found in the rubbish of a place where a group of Jews had hidden from the Nazis happened to be the diary of a young girl. And it may be that the force of circumstances in our time has truly exacerbated the perennial anguish of youth in worlds it does not make. Of all the Jeremiads ever heard and unheeded, the most poignant and damning may be the cries of the young, the innocents. But there is something symptomatic of the reigning juvenilism of our present popular culture in the way the play and film of the diary of Anne Frank transform its existence and meaning.

On stage, under Garson Kanin's direction, the melodrama and the romance were thematically dominant, but the theatrical distance from the setting and characters offered the possibility of perspective. From this distance, for example, it appeared that the Goodrich and Hackett dramatization set off the conventionalized adolescence of Anne by magnifying her own idealized image of her father. We may overlook

invidious speculations arising during the controversy over the Levin version as to how much the stage Otto Frank had affected the actual Otto Frank in his decision to support the Bloomgarden production. But it must be said that the emergence of the father as so all-wise, all-prudent a figure of force, despite the restraint of Joseph Schildkraut's superb performance, adds more to the melodrama than to the sense of recreated actuality. In one aspect, the power of the father in the play grows in proportion as the power of the book is diluted in the dramatized character of Anne.

On screen, the camera's elimination of distance in the theatre, particularly in the use of close-ups, increases the imbalances of the play's transcription of the book. The least expression on the girl's face is not simply enlarged, but completely fills the enormous CinemaScope frame. Her scenes with the boy, which on stage already exaggerated the delicate, hesitant, and by no means paramount relationship described in the book, on screen become climatic—and misleading. The choice of Miss Perkins for the role of Anne itself says much about the conception of the book to be realized on screen. Her resemblance to the surviving likenesses of Anne is as the movies traditionally would have it: every similar feature distinctly prettier, and in ways quite according to topical, fashion-model modes of beauty. Her inexperience as an actress is treated as an advantage, with her limited but quite exhausting repertoire of lisps, pouts, and other mannerisms made to protest her sincerity in a role requiring from childish tantrum to grown-up introspection. Her age points up one of the ways whereby American movies during the past decade have catered to the self-glorification of adolescent audiences.

It is not accident that consistently places actors and actresses in their twenties and even older in roles of adolescents, but the reflection on screen of fantasied behaviour, making propaganda for actual behaviour in a deadly roundabout. The popular image of the adolescent, moreover, requires performers of greater age and experience for satisfactory dramatic projection and vicarious fulfilment. When this fashionable representation of adolescence is injected into the dramatizations of the diary of Anne Frank, what remains of the book vanishes before our eyes. In its place, we are left with quite another work. The play and film may possess many qualities that are comparatively worthy. But what they make of the heroine can have no more than fictional bearing upon the true tragedy of Anne Frank, the little girl who died, one among millions.

That tragedy had begun to be evaded at the moment it was discovered—and the evasions have persisted, perhaps just because the dreadful evidence proved so much. And the play and the film of the diary of Anne Frank are themselves evasions—although made by dedicated people with excellent intentions, and the courage to be serious at the rites of entertainment. For, the more fully the individuals in the audience are brought to imagine themselves in the place of the heroine, according to the design of the dramatizations, the more truly do they evade real confrontation of the archetypal victim. To only pity the girl, her family and companions in hiding is evasion enough. To be projected into vicarious participation in the particular, formally conventional romance and melodrama, however, leads to the inversion of pity to pity of self: to the purging of guilt, responsibility, and even memory in a catharsis of sweet sadness.

Sadness is not enough. The saddest truth of all is that a vast proportion of those seeing the play and film know little of even the facts of the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis, and will not be led to knowledge in the theatres. The film reviewer of a leading family weekly, that happens to be Catholic in direction, can write a reverent appreciation of the Stevens production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* for the same issue in which a letter is published asserting that there was not one gas chamber in any German concentration camp, and that it is an 'old propaganda myth that millions of Jews were killed by the national socialists'. The letter applauds the opinions of one of the weekly's regular columnists, to the effect that continued concern with the Nazi atrocities is unwarranted defamation of persons of German descent everywhere, and that 'the rehashing of such bitter memories would hardly help . . . (a tourist) . . . enjoy his holiday in Germany'. The story of the little Jewess in the movie will not make Christians of these people if the sacred drama of that other Jew has not done so by this time.



# Heard and Seen

## THE MAGICIANS

Ever since the dawn of cinema there have been magicians. When Lumière resolutely took the path of realism in those first five-minute films, showing us undeniable trains, veritable fire-engines and disasters and humiliations only too recognisably from daily life, Méliés had already chosen, quite as resolutely, to send a man to the moon, to present fairy coaches travelling through sleeping woods, to give us in short marvels instead of documentaries.

Two of the greatest magicians the cinema has ever known have been much in the news of late. Cocteau because in October he astonished us once again, as all those years ago he had done in obedience to Diaghilev's command, dying this time in fact instead of with that hallucinatory backwards fall in *Testament d'Orphée*, when he commented gravely that since poets on occasion gave the impression of dying then their friends might permit themselves the appearance of weeping. And Orson Welles—so long a film-maker and still only middle-aged—because he has attempted perhaps the most impossible task of his never cautious career in bringing Kafka's *Trial* to the screen, which reached London a good six months after it opened in Paris.

Cocteau always insisted that all the work he did, in any medium, was the work of a poet. Certainly none but a poet could have made his films, the first of which he even called *Sang d'un Poète*. Even in films which he did not actually direct himself, such as J.-P. Melville's version of his play, *Les Enfants Terribles*, his influence was as immediately visible as those stars so invariably a part of his signature. Of those he did direct, there are some which more brilliantly exemplify his power to bind an audience in a potent visual spell than others. First, *L'Éternel Retour*, his version of the Tristan story in modern idiom, which reached us after VE day; one will never forget the extraordinary richness—an almost overpowering richness—of the experience after all our years of cinematic austerity. We had been perforce taking it, with the rest of Britain; here was Cocteau simply pushing aside the necessity to take anything and imposing an imperious form on a story already heady enough. The film closed with what has become one of the classic shots of the cinematic archives. The lovers—Jean Marais then at the height of his blond beauty and Madeleine Sologne—lie in state on an upturned boat and the camera tracks back from their becalmed tranquillity to bring us reluctantly to reality as the lights go up inexorably. *La Belle et la Bête* would have delighted Méliés by its invention and visual beauty. The unsophisticated pastoral of Beauty's home changes to the protean tricks of the Beast's palace, where living hands reach out from the walls with torches, or long white curtains billow softly in the evening breeze.

But Cocteau's idiosyncratic personal language has perhaps crystallised for